

NEWS RELEASE

Singapore, 14 July 2021

International research team led by NTU Singapore converts tamarind shells into an energy source for vehicles

Shells of tamarind, a tropical fruit consumed worldwide, are discarded during food production. As they are bulky, tamarind shells take up a considerable amount of space in landfills where they are disposed as agricultural waste.

However, a team of international scientists led by **Nanyang Technological University, Singapore (NTU Singapore)** has found a way to deal with the problem. By processing the tamarind shells which are rich in carbon, the scientists converted the waste material into carbon nanosheets, which are a key component of supercapacitors - energy storage devices that are used in automobiles, buses, electric vehicles, trains, and elevators.

The study reflects NTU's commitment to address humanity's grand challenges on sustainability as part of its 2025 strategic plan, which seeks to accelerate the translation of research discoveries into innovations that mitigate our impact on the environment.

The team, made up of researchers from NTU Singapore, the **Western Norway University of Applied Sciences** in Norway, and **Alagappa University** in India, believes that these nanosheets, when scaled up, could be an eco-friendly alternative to their industrially produced counterparts, and cut down on waste at the same time.

Assistant Professor (Steve) Cuong Dang, from NTU's School of Electrical and Electronic Engineering, who led the study, said: "Through a series of analysis, we found that the performance of our tamarind shell-derived nanosheets was comparable to their industrially made counterparts in terms of porous structure and electrochemical properties. The process to make the nanosheets is also the standard method to produce active carbon nanosheets."

Professor G. Ravi, Head, Department of Physics, who co-authored the study with **Asst Prof Dr R. Yuvakkumar**, who are both from **Alagappa University**, said: "The

use of tamarind shells may reduce the amount of space required for landfills, especially in regions in Asia such as India, one of the world's largest producers of tamarind, which is also grappling with waste disposal issues."

The study was published in the peer-reviewed scientific journal *Chemosphere* in June.

The step-by-step recipe for carbon nanosheets

To manufacture the carbon nanosheets, the researchers first washed tamarind fruit shells and dried them at 100°C for around six hours, before grinding them into powder.

The scientists then baked the powder in a furnace for 150 minutes at 700-900 degrees Celsius in the absence of oxygen to convert them into ultrathin sheets of carbon known as nanosheets.

Tamarind shells are rich in carbon and porous in nature, making them an ideal material from which to manufacture carbon nanosheets.

A common material used to produce carbon nanosheets are industrial hemp fibres. However, they require to be heated at over 180°C for 24 hours – four times longer than that of tamarind shells, and at a higher temperature. This is before the hemp is further subjected to intense heat to convert them into carbon nanosheets.

Professor Dhayalan Velauthapillai, Head of the research group for Advanced Nanomaterials for Clean Energy and Health Applications at Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, who participated in the study, said: "Carbon nanosheets comprise of layers of carbon atoms arranged in interconnecting hexagons, like a honeycomb. The secret behind their energy storing capabilities lies in their porous structure leading to large surface area which help the material to store large amounts of electric charges."

The tamarind shell-derived nanosheets also showed good thermal stability and electric conductivity, making them promising options for energy storage.

The researchers hope to explore larger scale production of the carbon nanosheets with agricultural partners. They are also working on reducing the energy needed for the production process, making it more environmentally friendly, and are seeking to improve the electrochemical properties of the nanosheets.

The team also hopes to explore the possibility of using different types of fruit skins or shells to produce carbon nanosheets.

END

Note to Editors:

Paper titled '*Cleaner production of tamarind fruit shell into bio-mass derived porous 3D-activated carbon nanosheets by CVD technique for supercapacitor applications*' published in *Chemosphere*, 2 June, 2021, 131033.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chemosphere.2021.131033>

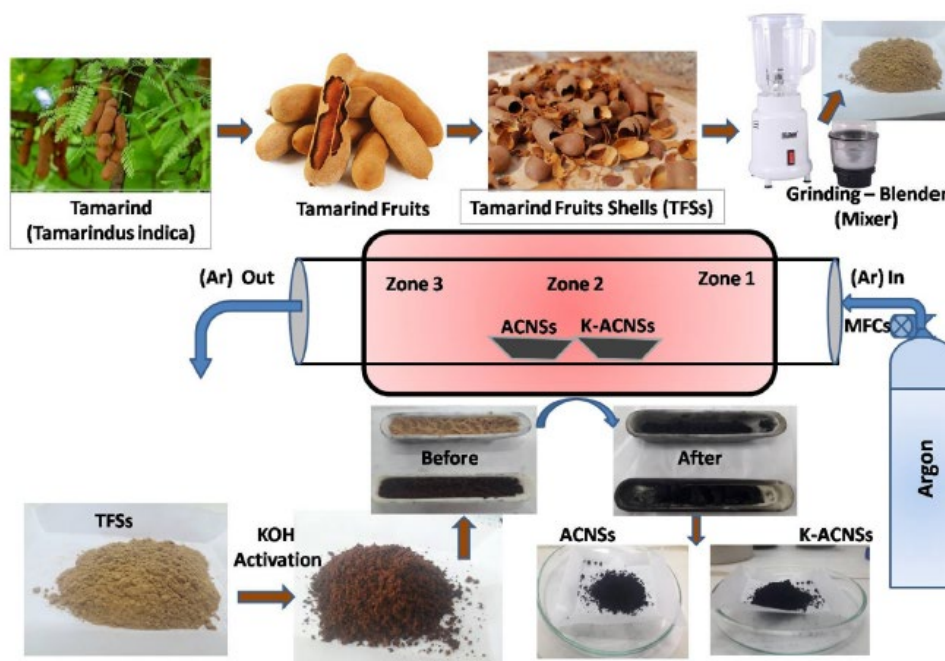


Image 1: A representation of the experimental process, as well as photographs of the tamarind shell at every step.

Media contact:

Mr Joseph Gan
Manager, Media Relations
Corporate Communications Office
Nanyang Technological University, Singapore
Email: joseph.gan@ntu.edu.sg

About Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

A research-intensive public university, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore (NTU Singapore) has 33,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students in the Engineering, Business, Science, Humanities, Arts, & Social Sciences, and Graduate

colleges. It also has a medical school, the Lee Kong Chian School of Medicine, established jointly with Imperial College London.

NTU is also home to world-renowned autonomous institutes – the National Institute of Education, S Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Earth Observatory of Singapore, and Singapore Centre for Environmental Life Sciences Engineering – and various leading research centres such as the Nanyang Environment & Water Research Institute (NEWRI) and Energy Research Institute @ NTU (ERI@N).

Ranked amongst the world's top universities by QS, NTU has also been named the world's top young university for the last seven years. The University's main campus is frequently listed among the Top 15 most beautiful university campuses in the world and it has 57 Green Mark-certified (equivalent to LEED-certified) building projects, of which 95% are certified Green Mark Platinum. Apart from its main campus, NTU also has a campus in Singapore's healthcare district.

Under the NTU Smart Campus vision, the University harnesses the power of digital technology and tech-enabled solutions to support better learning and living experiences, the discovery of new knowledge, and the sustainability of resources.

For more information, visit www.ntu.edu.sg